

Compiled by Dennis Roth

### ***Electronic Byways: State Policies for Rural Development Through Telecommunications, Second Edition Revised.***

Edwin B. Parker and Heather E. Hudson with Don A. Dillman, Sharon Strover, and Frederick Williams. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, 1995. 306 pages. ISBN 0-89843-178-6 (paper) \$15.00. To order, call 202-736-5804.

Electronic superhighways, information highways, telecommunication byways—we need a Rand McNally map to determine where we've been and where we're going in *Electronic Byways*. The five authors, each responsible for a portion of this reference-style book, provide an array of beneficial information on rural telecommunications, albeit the presentation is at times disjointed and repetitive. But the vast amount of reference materials, from descriptions of policy issues to appendixes listing organizations and agencies involved in rural telecommunications, more than compensate for the shortcomings of the book's format and style.

The emphasis of *Electronic Byways* is on methods to improve rural telecommunications. I found the authors' choice of "byway" interesting, for we may, in attempting to upgrade and expand rural telecommunications, find that we are indeed on a rural byway, which, the last time I traveled one, was an obscure dirt road. Along these remote roads, the authors indicate that the lack of telephone service should be a major policy concern. Seven percent of U.S. households do not have telephone service, and most likely a good number of these households are in locations far removed from some form of telecommunication services. But some households without service may be in depressed rural areas or inner cities where telephone service is available but unaffordable. That 93 percent of U.S. households have telephone service is a statistic which, perhaps, should not be viewed as extremely shameful, considering that a recent *Wall Street Journal* article stated that two-thirds of all people in the world have never used a telephone. This is not to say that it is an unreasonable goal to provide telephone service to all Americans, but some small percentage of households will probably always be without service for various reasons.

Regulatory incentives are first introduced in chapter 1 as a prime option to spur investment in rural telecommunications, through which "major upgrades to the telecommunications infrastructure can be made without taxpayer dollars or raising telephone rates!" However, the appropriate regulatory incentives that result in productivity gains for industry and economic development of rural areas are not immediately explained, leaving me somewhat perplexed as to the magic of these regulatory adjustments. Some 23 pages elapse before Incentive Regulations I and II are discussed to provide insight into why regulatory

incentives can lead to increased investment in the telecommunication infrastructure. Incentive Regulation II is characterized as "management by objectives," which simply provide carriers with designated goals that, once achieved, allow them to retain a higher percentage of profits. This regulation is not currently in force, but it is the authors' incentive plan of choice for achieving rural development goals.

I found greater benefit from the discussions regarding the roles of State and local agencies in developing rural telecommunications. Myriad programs and studies undertaken by these agencies provide information about steps that have worked to improve rural telecommunications in local areas. This anecdotal evidence helps the reader gain insight into programs that appear successful in achieving development goals. I am certain that planners and policymakers will look to these success stories and use them to mold their own programs.

The authors are quite comprehensive in their citations of rural telecommunication development programs, providing examples of policies adopted in areas across the Nation. However, citation of a New Jersey study may be inappropriate. The New Jersey study appeared under the subtitle, "Why Businesses Are Attracted to Rural Areas." Although the study identified valid reasons for businesses to locate in specific areas, I believe the authors are stretching their presentation to include a study conducted in New Jersey as an observation of rural development. As a native New Jerseyite who realizes that the State is the most densely populated in the Nation, I question the "rural" label. All counties in New Jersey are metropolitan (the only State for which this is true), and less than 11 percent of New Jersey's population in 1990 lived in what the Bureau of the Census considers a rural area. Granted, some farms, undeveloped recreational areas, and forest preserves remain in the State, but I believe that any business interested in locating in New Jersey need not worry about adequate access to telecommunications.

After reading the success stories and development benefits of advanced rural telecommunications, I am left with the thought that the proposed policies to improve telecommunications are dependent upon the basic question of dollars and cents; that is, who is going to pay for upgrading rural telecommunications? Telecommunication providers are not going to make an investment to improve services in areas where most residents consider existing service adequate. If the population does not demand new services or is insufficient to support an advanced telecommunications infrastructure, the providers will ask, and rightly so, "Why build it?" The authors respond to this question by pointing to a Catch-22 answer in which potential rural customers reply that they cannot know if they want modern services if they have never seen or experienced them. This may be

a valid response, but I believe no telecommunications provider, as the authors acknowledge, would be willing to expend resources to supply service without an assurance of demand.

Most of *Electronic Byways* led me to think that the authors believe that rural areas need only a full-service telecommunications system to achieve economic development. Chapter 6 offered a more realistic picture as the authors remind us that “[t]elecommunications is a catalyst and facilitator, not a magic solution.” That is, active rural development programs must complement telecommunications advancements in order for rural areas to prosper. If this condition is met, all parties—residents, businesses, and governments—working together to use telecommunications to the fullest may allow local communities to reap the greatest development benefit from investment in these telecommunication systems. Maybe then the rural byways can gain easier access to lanes on the information superhighways.

*Reviewed by Alex Majchrowicz, an agricultural economist at ERS-RED.*

### ***The Capacity for Wonder: Preserving National Parks***

William R. Lowry. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 1994. 290 pages. ISBN 0-8157-5298-9 (paper) \$18.95. To order, call 202-797-6258.

*The Capacity for Wonder* provides an overview of the development of the parks systems in Canada and the United States and the divergence of goals of preservation between the two countries. The author provides evidence that supports his contention that reduced Federal funding for the U.S. National Park Service and degradation of employee support has followed the loss of political support. Lowry notes that long-time observers see the more centralized oversight of the parks constraining and diminishing the local on-site discretion previously practiced by park personnel. Park rangers are trained to emphasize visitor relations, law enforcement, and financial management rather than preservation of the natural resources. Contrast that with the emerging Canadian Park Service philosophy of preservation first, then, if the parks can handle it, attention to visitors. This theory is effectively illustrated by the story of a grizzly bear which wandered into the visitor area of a Canadian park. People were instructed to stay in the lodge while at the visitor area, and they were bused to another area for hiking. Surprisingly, Lowry tells us that the visitors were “100 percent supportive of the ranger’s decision.” Following this story are examples entitled “Why you won’t see grizzly bears in Yellowstone” and “Why you will see plains and wood bison in Elk Island (Canada).” The book continues with several other examples showing the differences in parkland philosophy between Canada and the United States.

Lowry also provides more substantive information on the park systems and policies. Statistics such as visits to U.S. and Canadian parks, appropriations, acres burned in Yellowstone National Park during 1930-91, grizzly bears in Yellowstone, and revenue value of building permits in parks are discussed. Maps of the Canadian and U.S. park boundaries and tables and charts describing the organizational structure of regional offices abound. Using evidence from the General Accounting Office,

the Canadian and U.S. Park Services, and congressional reports, he supports his thesis that an agency’s ability to pursue the goal of preservation largely depends on public and political support and the commitment of the employees. Because political pressures in the two counties have diverged with respect to the use of park lands, the emphasis on preservation has taken a different tack in each. Lowry indicates that the Clinton administration seems to be less development and more preservation oriented, but that U.S. parks continue to be under pressure to service visitors rather than the resources they were established to protect. He ends the book with a theoretical evaluation of the future of preservation of park lands.

The book makes for good reading, but if you expect, as I did, a book entitled *The Capacity for Wonder* to contain color photographs of grand vistas and exotic wildlife, you will be disappointed. It has none except the one on the front cover. A minor quibble, however, for a book providing so much information.

*Reviewed by Janet Perry, an agricultural economist with ERS-RED.*

### ***Food Labor Organizing: Trends and Prospects***

Maralyn Edid. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1994, 144 pages. ISBN 0-87546-321-5 (cloth) \$12.95. To order, call 607-255-2264.

As labor laws and immigration reform have received renewed government attention in recent years, agricultural labor issues have also reappeared in government deliberations, on both the State and Federal levels. Maralyn Edid’s *Farm Labor Organizing: Trends and Prospects* is a direct result of this trend. Her book grows out of a study commissioned by the New York State Department of Labor to determine whether farmworkers should be included under the State’s labor relations act that protected collective bargaining and organizing rights for other workers. She supplemented those findings with testimony she prepared for the Commission on Agricultural Workers on the effects of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 on farmworker organizing. Making good use of her journalistic training in simplifying complex issues, Edid has produced a very readable account of the important events and issues surrounding farmworker organizing in the 20th century United States.

Edid sets farmworker organizing within the context of the broader tradition of American labor unions. She emphasizes particularly the importance of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 in protecting the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively and the benefits unions have provided for workers through such collective bargaining. Against this background, she describes the persistent exclusion of farmworkers from this legislation and the collective bargaining process, connecting that exclusion to the attendant poor conditions of farm work. Despite the suggestion that lack of legal protection for unionization sustains such conditions, however, Edid acknowledges the complications created for farmworker organizing by continual immigration of new workers and the powerful combination of interests and prejudices that work against political support for protection of farmworker unionization.

Edid contrasts the apparent powerlessness of farmworkers in the larger context of U.S. labor law and union traditions with the story of union organizing and collective bargaining successes by farmworkers over the last century, mostly in California. She describes the difficulties presented to organizers by the perpetu-

ally changing characteristics of the migrant and seasonal farm workforce as immigration laws and labor demands altered grower preferences. She notes especially the impediment created by government-supported foreign labor importation programs. Yet in spite of these obstacles, Edid writes, the United Farm Workers eventually organized a large number of workers, sponsored a successful national grape boycott, and saw the establishment of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board. She acknowledges, however, the union's subsequent disillusionment with such government labor protection systems following political changes in the State. Outside California, Edid documents the varieties of more recent farm labor organizations, their separation from one another, and their independent successes and, more often, failures with collective bargaining.

Perhaps of most value, Edid analyzes the particular characteristics of the farm workforce that have precluded long-term success, focusing on a whole list of factors that divide the workforce. Those factors include intense economic competition brought on by continual oversupply of workers, language and cultural barriers arising from racial and ethnic diversity among workers, lack of economic and even social independence because of control by farm labor contractors, and the inability to form lasting associations because of the physical isolation of most farm work and the seasonal migrations required to make a living. These divisions, Edid asserts, coupled with the lack of consistent political support from the public and the broader labor movement and the lack of legal protection for farmworker organizing, keep successes isolated and short-lived.

Edid concludes by arguing for protection of organizing and collective bargaining rights for agricultural labor under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which she views as the essential underpinning for improving the well-being of farmworkers and their families. She also recommends a series of reforms in the NLRA that would speed up the recognition of unions and increase the value of the law to farmworkers. These suggested reforms include, for example, expediting the election process, reducing the ability of employers to undermine bargaining efforts through procedural delays, and relying more on formal rulemaking, rather than on slowly establishing precedents on a case-by-case basis.

Although these changes undoubtedly would benefit agricultural workers, Edid undermines her argument for the central role of NLRA protection for farmworkers with the litany of obstacles to farmworker unionizing she presents in earlier chapters. Readers will find it hard to accept her concluding assessment that the many constraints on farmworker unionization can be overcome effectively simply through labor law reform. Moreover, even in the few cases she describes in which farmworkers have acquired government protection of bargaining rights, Edid makes clear the vulnerability of such legal protection to the vagaries of political ideology and influence.

Still, though far from an unbiased portrayal of the issue, the study may serve well as a brief overview of the history and current state of farmworker organizing. Edid clearly deplores the conditions under which farmworkers and their families live and work and sees unionization as the only solution. Yet she makes some effort to acknowledge the legitimacy of grower and government positions and to present a more reasoned picture than is often the case in coverage of farmworker issues. Her bibliography reflects a broad research effort and her list of interviews includes a balance of union, academic, and grower representatives, although directly citing those sources throughout the

book, rather than combining them in a general list at the end, could have helped readers understand more clearly the roots of some of her views. But whether one agrees with those views or not, all but the best informed will finish the book with a better grasp of the extent and variety of farm labor organizing efforts and the legal and political constraints that affect their progress.

*Reviewed by Anne B. W. Effland, a social science analyst in ERS-RED.*

### ***Shepherdess: Notes from the Field***

Joan Jarvis Ellison. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1995. 172 pages. ISBN 1-55753-070-x (paper) \$14.95. To order call 317-494-2035.

This book is a memoir of a woman who has a masters degree in biochemistry, lives in a small town in Minnesota, and does not want to drive 2 hours each way to work at the university. Her local job choices are assembly-line work or clerking because she does not have training for nursing or teaching (the only high-level jobs in her town). She retired from biochemistry to be a full-time mom. She says "after ten years of being a nonperson because of this career choice, I was ready for a change." Married to a doctor, she longed to be something other than the doctor's wife or Mom. She "needed to be a professional again, an expert, in charge." She enjoyed knitting and spinning, she loved animals, and her neighbors raised cattle and sheep. She reasoned she could control her projects from sheep to sweater and still be home for her daughters. So she bought four sheep as pets.

Ellison takes the reader through the process of selecting the best breed of sheep for the type of fleece/yarn desired, then through the process of breeding and lambing in quite explicit detail. This book is filled with detailed accounts of problems that can arise during these processes and finding solutions to those problems when there is no one else around to help. After 7 years of being a shepherdess (and a flock of more than 40 sheep), she ends the book by wondering if the personal costs of being a shepherdess were worthwhile. She writes "The personal costs of being a shepherdess are much higher than I imagined—exhaustion, anguish, depression. Is it worth it?" But the sheep had already been bred. She'll have to wait till after the next lambing to decide.

This story is well suited to the memoir format. Ellison's sense of humor shines through in her accounts of some of the ordeals she encountered. Many of the problems she encountered during lambing were remedied only by doing things she would have thought unthinkable only the year before. Through all the episodes, however, you can feel her love for the sheep. Her husband and daughters pitch in and help when needed (as does her mother), making it a family project.

While I applaud her success, I am left with some unsettling thoughts. First, how lucky she is to have such a supportive family to rely on for peak labor and moral support—she could not have solved some of her crises by herself. Next, I expect few people can be impassioned by a project and not be concerned about whether it is profitable or not. Also, I wonder exactly how much full-time mothering gets done as she is consumed with lambing or other aspects of the process. She frequently mentions falling into bed clothed only to rise again a few hours later. She also makes frequent mention of housework undone



and the girls getting themselves off to school. But in the end, she states she now considers herself a shepherdess, and you get the sense she is fulfilled and is now the “professional” she longed to be at the beginning.

*Reviewed by Nora Brooks, an agricultural economist at ERS-RED.*

### **Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940**

Mary Neth. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995. 347 pages. ISBN 0-8018-4898-9 (cloth) \$39.95. To order call 1-800-537-5487.

Contrary to the title, this is not a book about preserving the family farm. Instead Neth reviews, sometimes nostalgically, the early 1900's era of farming in America. She spends the entire book illustrating Karl Marx's seldom questioned observation that changing production techniques change the sociology of production as well. The self-sufficient family farm, exchange labor between farmers, and the close-knit community-minded farming community were casualties of the mechanization of agriculture. Neth laments this change as also a loss of gender equity in the farm family. While building a rather strong case for this loss, Neth often sees moves by government and “agribusiness” as planned to cause a situation when unintended consequences of mechanization or government efforts to support the sector probably explain the situation just as well.

Neth pines for a day of farmer and farmwife toiling side-by-side in a struggle to preserve the farm, the family, and the community. She correctly notes that as farming became more mechanized and more dependent upon off-farm inputs and off-farm markets, the power of the farmwife diminished and her role changed. Nevertheless, with mechanization of farming and the growth of agribusiness (a term Davis and Goldberg didn't coin until 1955) came economic development and enhancements in living standards. If given the choice, I expect many early farm women would have traded their power in the family and in farm decisions for some of the labor-saving mechanization and risk-reducing contracts with agribusiness that made farm life less taxing for later generations.

My paternal grandparents fit Neth's description of early farm life. They bought a 160-acre farm in Crawford County, IA, in the late 1890's. They participated in many of the family and community activities Neth describes (to the extent allowed for German-Americans in that period), lost forty acres, paid off the farm mortgage on the rest, and in many ways probably had a farm life similar to that for which Neth nostalgically yearns. But, Grandmother Schluter died in 1920 after having 12 children in 23 years. It is hard for me to believe that she had a better quality of life than my mother who shared roles on that farm with my father during the mechanizing, agribusiness-developing next generation. It is just as difficult for me to accept that my mother had a better quality of life than my sister who now runs the farm with her husband in an even more mechanized/agribusiness-dominated generation.

It often appears that Neth wishes family farmers had forsaken all modernization and kept their traditional, more self-sufficient intact family orientation. In chapter 5, she seems to say that educating farm children was a mistake because it gave up some

control of their destiny to forces outside the farm community. If staying traditional and uneducated were not possible, Neth seems to think family farmers should at least have organized with their own class, not with the educated professional agricultural workers, the agribusiness community, or that “middle-class organization,” the Farm Bureau. Farmers and farm families have often disappointed the political left. If they knew their place, they would organize with the downtrodden. But, they did not consider themselves downtrodden, they thought they were middle class. In another context, Neth cites, from a 1912 issue of *Farmer's Wife*, the secretary of the woman's club in South Dakota who pleads not to be patronized,

“When we realize in some ways the lives of farmers' wives are circumscribed, we also realize our many advantages and we watch with interest the turning of the tide of thought among Federated club women to the “uplift” of our class of people. ...We welcome every co-operative aid; but our lives are different and it may be that we have something of wealth to offer to our town sisters as they have to us. Is there no way for the two classes to meet without the appearance of superiority or patronage on the one side, and consequently humiliation on the other?” (p. 135).

I found the book interesting and recommend it to those interested in farm life in the Midwest during the early 20th century. But, this book should be read in combination with other books on the subject and the period. This book has an objective. It is not objective. The author “knows” why too many events happened, events whose origin and meaning other scholars still debate, for me to recommend it as a stand-alone reference.

*Reviewed by Gerald Schluter, an agricultural economist in ERS-RED.*

### **So Shall You Reap: Farming and Crops in Human Affairs**

Otto T. Solbrig and Dorothy J. Solbrig. Washington, DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1994, 284 pages. ISBN 1-55963-308-5 (cloth) \$27.50. To order, call 202-232-7933.

Originally written to support a Harvard University undergraduate course, *So Shall You Reap: Farming and Crops in Human Affairs* surveys the development of agriculture over the last 10,000 years from the perspective of its effect on human society and the natural environment. Otto Solbrig, Bussey Professor of Biology at Harvard, and Dorothy Solbrig, Librarian in the Biological Laboratories at Harvard, trace the transformations in human food acquisition from hunter-gatherer societies to modern commercial agriculture, highlighting in particular the interactive development of human society and plants. The Solbrigs follow the progression of agricultural practices from the earliest bands of humans through the first efforts at cultivating plants, the rise of ancient civilizations based on irrigated agriculture, the adaptation of farming to European lands, and the growth of scientific agriculture, to the development of modern commercial farming and food production.

As they describe the adoption of various agricultural crops, techniques, and implements, the Solbrigs relate those developments to changes in human social organization and to resultant conse-

quences for the natural environment. For example, the authors explain the interconnection between adoption of irrigation in the Middle East and the rise of hierarchical societies like Assyria and Egypt, at the same time pointing out the ultimate contribution of irrigation to the decline of many of those societies from agricultural infertility caused by salt buildup in the soil. Likewise, the Solbrigs recount the importance of such profitable specialized crops as sugar, coffee, and tobacco in fueling world trade and spurring the growth of urban centers, but note also the environmental and social damage brought in their wake as the monocultures these crops encouraged depleted the soil and displaced smaller, diversified, self-sufficient farmers.

Embedded in the authors' presentation is a clear concern about the environmental damage of modern agricultural practices that both reduce the diversity of plant varieties and alter the landscape through continually expanding farms to produce not only food, but also industrial raw materials. The authors also clearly worry about the social effects of transforming small, diversified, Third World farmers into high-input commercial farmers, while at the same time forcing landless rural workers from farming areas into urban centers. Yet their conclusions suggest a faith in human ingenuity and technological creativity to solve both the social and environmental problems inherent in the need to feed an ever-expanding human population with an ever-contracting resource base.

This work is written in an easy, conversational style and is full of fascinating facts and digressions, much like a college lecture. Unfortunately, also like many college lectures, the authors often ramble, covering the same ground several times in different places and moving frequently into tangentially related subjects as they work through their chronological framework. Readers will also find perplexing the disjuncture between the authors' consistent theme of environmental damage from agricultural technology and their vague and optimistic expectations about

the future sustainability of agriculture through advances in technology.

More troubling, however, are the authoritative assertions, particularly about the causes of historical change, that appear without citations. Knowing the authors' expertise in botany, the information on plants may perhaps be accepted without much question, but the historical details are misleadingly over-generalized, boiling the social, economic, and political complexities of the development of human society down to simplified depictions of the causes and effects of agricultural change. By leaving out citations to the sources of evidence for such conclusions, the authors suggest their version of human history is uniformly accepted and does not require attribution. The Solbrigs' pronouncements about agricultural impacts on the environment reflect a similar disregard for the complexity of the issues, suggesting again that the facts the authors present are undisputed. Although many readers will share their views on the social and environmental consequences of modern commercial agriculture, such positions should not be offered as though there were no debate.

Given these limitations, I would hesitate to recommend this book. It can be an enjoyable read, and those interested in the development of agricultural plants will find the detail on plant domestication and intercontinental exchanges absorbing. For gathering an understanding of the historical sweep of human social evolution related to agriculture, however, the book is inadequate and, in some cases, even inaccurate. Since its authoritative style may convince readers unfamiliar with the subject that they are receiving undisputed truth, those who choose to read the book should do so with that proviso in mind.

*Reviewed by Anne B. W. Effland, a social science analyst with RED/ERS.*